



SPS member profile: Stephen Rockower, MD

August 2021 member spotlight



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Stephen Rockower, MD President, MedChi 2016-17 Board Member, AMPAC AMA Ambassador

Q: The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way most of us interact with one another from in-person conversations to online modes of communication such as video conferencing, phone calls, texts, or email. What lessons have you learned from the pandemic and what do you see as having a particular impact on retired physicians?

A: While mask wearing was never a problem for me as a surgeon, I know it was a burden for many other doctors and patients. Because we had essentially no patients coming in the door for months, I made the decision to retire.

The few patients we did see often were wearing such heavy respirator masks that I could not hear what they were saying. The area in Maryland where I live was good about wearing masks, so it was uncommon to have to remind people to wear them. Many retired physicians I know were basically hermits through last winter, rarely venturing outside the house. Obviously, now in the summer of 2021, this has begun to change.

Q: As a senior physician leader, how have your daily activities changed since retiring? How have you stayed informed on current issues impacting change in the medical community?

A: There are many video and text journals available. The weekly *JAMA* helps to keep me abreast, and webinars and podcasts are valuable, both for medical and non-medical topics. I have become very adept at Zoom! Social media is a tool as well as a hindrance in connecting with other physicians. We set up weekly or biweekly Zoom meetings to connect with friends and colleagues.

I continue to work with my local and state medical societies, working on local issues important to physicians. Being a "political animal," I attended many virtual meetings and fundraisers with our legislators.

In addition, I maintained and participated in meetings for the Montgomery County Medical Society and for MedChi, the Maryland State Medical Society, of which I am still a member on their Boards, and on their Foundation Board. Our Legislative Committee continued to function under Zoom (actually saving me the weekly drive to Baltimore)!

In addition, our "pandemic puppy" has taken a lot of my time and attention! I have begun working at a local charity clinic to provide office orthopaedic care to give back to my community.



Dr. Rockower at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

Prior to the pandemic, I had been a volunteer docent at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, most recently working in the Fossil Hall, “Deep Time.”

I had to switch to a Zoom format to give presentations, ranging from the AMA Ambassadors to Rotary groups to National medical meetings, etc. Some have even been international. I have been reading to enlarge my paleontology knowledge, as I work to promote fossils other than myself!

Q: You are currently serving as an AMA Ambassador to the AMA. What events did you enjoy most over the past year, and do you prefer social or educational programming events?

The AMA Ambassador Program, staffed by J. Mori Johnson, has been a lifesaver for many with webinars and events for all to attend! I have enjoyed both the educational and social events, especially those outlining the CPT coding system. As an Ambassador, I spend a lot of time on social media (in and out of physician groups) discussing with other physicians the value of joining the AMA. The Ambassador program has been quite helpful to answer questions posed to me, and to provide support in discussions with those unfamiliar with the AMA.

The June 2021 meeting (held virtually) forced upon us by the pandemic has obviously been stressful. I have been amazed and impressed by all the hard work by our HOD Speakers and HOD staff to pull these off. In-person meetings are best, but under the circumstances, these came off with hardly a hitch. And, yes, I paid my \$10 fine to the AMA Foundation for the times I kept myself on mute by accident!



In addition to being an AMA Ambassador, my work with AMPAC has been very fruitful and enjoyable. To be sure, the events of January 6 at the US Capitol were stressful for all of us, and I had many frank and productive meetings. In the end, cool heads have prevailed, and we continue to promote the aims of the AMA. The AMA remains strong and continues to work for the behalf of physicians and patients!

Contact us

Have information about SPS members doing great work? Email us at sps@ama-assn.org.